DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 803 TM 011 118

AUTHOR Moore, Arnold J.
TITLE A Need for and the Role of Research Bureaus in Conducting Teacher Education Evaluations at Large Universities.
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Data Collection; *Educational Research; Evaluation; Higher Education; *Program Evaluation; *Research and Development; Research and Development Centers; Research Design; Research Universities; *Schools of Education; *Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Mississippi State University

ABSTRACT

Among the functions of a college of education are engaging in basic research in education and helping the college and individual faculty members provide research for the clientele that the college serves. A formal structure for these tasks is required by large universities. At Mississippi State University (MSU), the Bureau of Research and Development (BRD) supplies these services with the help of support units such as the Test Item Bank and the Research and Curriculum Unit for Vocational and Technical Education. As an example of an evaluation study conducted through the College of Education, an evaluation directed by the BRD of the program in teacher education is presented. Four strategies of data collection were employed to obtain information about alumni morale and opinion of training received, current employment status of Master's Degree recipients, and effectiveness of MSU graduates in job performance as viewed by supervisors. Increased activities in research and service in the College of Education have provided better visibility for all its programs. (SLD)

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A NEED FOR AND THE ROLE OF RESEARCH BUREAUS IN CONDUCTING TEACHER EDUCATION EVALUATIONS AT LARGE UNIVERSITIES

Abstract

Colleges of Education have the responsibility of engaging in definitive basic research to advance the knowledge base of professional education and related disciplines as well as assisting both the College and individual faculty in providing the needed service and research functions to the various clientele that the College is expected to serve. In addition, the research function of any COE does require that individual faculty members have an organizational structure which will make it possible for them to conduct their own studies, supervise thesis and dissertation studies, and engage in funded research endeavors.

It is quite evident that large universities do need a formal line structure to accomplish this task. At MSU, this is accomplished through the Bureau of Research and Development which is directed by an Associate Dean and staffed by both departmental faculty and specialized Bureau personnel. Staff members from the various technical support units in the College of Education do perform basic research evaluating programs of instruction. In addition, these supportive units provide technical expertise to faculty and graduate students in the areas of research design, instrument construction, and analyses of data.

This paper also explicates the design of an evaluation study, the findings thereto, and the recommendations associated with program improvement are included in this brief treatise.

Arnold J. Moore
Dean, College of Education
Mississippi State University

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A NEED FOR AND THE ROLE OF RESEARCH BUREAUS IN CONDUCTING TEACHER EDUCATION EVALUATIONS AT LARGE UNIVERSITIES

Introduction

The mission of the Bureau of Educational Research and Evaluation is compatible with and complementary to those research portions of the mission statements of the College of Education and of its parent entity, Mississippi State University. Since 1904, when the first courses for teachers were offered, teacher education has been an important function of Mississippi State University. As a Land Grant institution, the University has increasingly fulfilled its responsibility to provide schools with competent teachers and service its membership. The mission of the College of Education has been to assist the University in accomplishing these responsibilities. More recently, increased activities in research and service within the College of Education have provided better visibility for its programs in these areas.

The faculty of the College of Education is committed to performing three major functions: (1) providing professional preparation for teachers, administrators, and school service personnel at undergraduate and graduate levels of instruction; (2) collaborating with school personnel, educational agencies, professional groups, and others interested in the evaluation and improvement of educational opportunities, programs and services; and (3) promoting and conducting experimental and other research studies in education to improve educational practice and to advance the theory in various educational disciplines.

The research function of the College of Education is fulfilled by both individual faculty members and special units within the College. First, investigative activities of individual faculty members as they conduct their own studies and supervise the thesis and dissertation studies of advanced graduate students provide new information relative to the disciplinary interests of the individual investigators. In addition, the College of Education currently has three agencies that perform research functions, namely, the Bureau of Educational Research and Evaluation (BERE), the Research and Curriculum Unit for Vocational and Technical Education (R/CU), and the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Blindness and Low Vision (RTC). Staff members from these units perform basic research functions by assisting public schools in developing, implementing, and evaluating programs of instruction. In addition, these supportive units provide technical expertise to faculty and graduate students in the areas of research design, instrument construction, and analysis of data. Members of these units also conduct research studies funded by such external agencies as the National Institute for Education, the United States Department of Education and the Mississippi State Department of Education.

TM 011 118

Service and research functions of the College are also fulfilled through the efforts of individual faculty members and through the activities of special units within the College. The Program of Research and Evaluation for Public Schools, Inc. (PREPS) began in 1975 when seven school districts in concert with the MSU College of Education established a cooperative relationship for providing technical assistance. The College of Education, through the BERE, formed a consortium with more than 30 public school systems in the state to conduct research and evaluation studies of both ongoing and innovative programs.

From the beginning, PREPS functioned as a service and research organization to its membership. In reality, it is a shared partnership. The initial emphasis of PREPS was to conduct, with local districts, research and evaluation for decision making. For the first eight years, over 100 such projects were completed--many leading to board-level decisions at the LEA and to shared knowledge with other districts. Concurrently, PREPS staff offered training opportunities on a wide range of research and development topics to PREPS districts. Other special purpose functions such as the Research Sharing Conference evolved into the state Testing Conference now a cooperative effort with the State Department of Education. In 1983, PREPS began the test item bank as an outgrowth of the state AIM efforts. TIB is a unique program to assist member districts and their teachers in instructional accountability. PREPS continues to be a program on the leading edge of Mississippi education.

The Test Item Bank (TIB) provides sound test items which save valuable time so that teachers have more time to teach. A microcomputer-based system operating on MS-DOS machines, the TIB covers all basic subjects K-12 and produces a ready to print criterion-referenced test. Tests are based on instructional objectives designated by the user and are appropriate for a unit or a semester. Not only is it easy to use, but the items are also field tested and undergo quality assurance of content validity, reliability, and sensitivity to instruction.

The R/CU, through cooperation with the State Department of Education, has assisted school systems in developing, implementing and evaluating programs in vocational/technical education during the past ten years. The R/CU also delivers an important service to business and industry by developing curriculum models and structuring instructional systems for preparing manpower to assume jobs in critical-needs areas.

The RTC was established in 1981 at Mississippi State University. The Center is cooperatively sponsored by the National Institute on

Handicapped Research and the COE with an annual budget of $750,000.

The RTC is dedicated to the study of blindness and low vision, and their effects on the employment and career of people who are blind or severely visually impaired. The programs of the RTC are based on the two following assumptions.

1. All visually-impaired people have a right to work at a wage comparable with non-disabled persons and in careers which provide satisfaction and opportunity for advancement.

2. Many more visually-impaired persons may obtain satisfying gainful employment through the utilization of research and development programs.

The research and development programs of the RTC strive to develop products which may be used by consumers and professionals to enhance the career development of blind and visually impaired persons.

The Mississippi Writing/Thinking Consortium is composed of five state universities that are developing materials and strategies to prepare teachers of all disciplines in how to improve the writing and thinking skills of students. The Consortium cooperates with the universities, the State Department of Education, and local school districts to establish a state-wide program to perform these activities and undertake research projects.

General Objectives/Research

General objectives for research activities in the College of Education are as follows:

1. To secure more visibility for research activities in the College of Education by working to increase faculty publications and presentation of papers to professional groups.

2. To foster increased research activities among faculty and staff members by:

   a. providing technical assistance for faculty in areas of research design and data analysis;

   b. assisting staff members in the development of proposals to be submitted for external funding, and

   c. holding seminars for exchange of research findings among faculty, administrators and graduate students.

3. To develop research studies jointly with public schools which provide data for program evaluation and development.

4. To improve the quality of graduate students' research by:

   a. developing research activities for students prior to their dissertation studies,

   b. coordinating research activities of students more closely with programs in existing research units, and

   c. giving increased emphasis to students' mastery skills in computer usage and data analysis.

5. To coordinate evaluative studies which provide data for decision-making functions within the College of Education.

An Evaluation Study

Herbert M. Handley, senior researcher, BERE, was the director of an extensive evaluation study to evaluate the program in teacher education at the Master's Degree level in the College of Education at Mississippi State University, including job situations, classroom performance of graduates completing the degree, graduates' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their program of studies at MSU.

To accomplish this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What is the current employment status of Master's Degree recipients?
2. How satisfied are graduates with their professional performance after graduation and with their program of studies at MSU?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Master's Degree level graduate programs in the College of Education?
4. As viewed by supervisors, how effective are MSU graduates in job performance?
5. What recommendations are made to improve the quality of graduate teacher education programs at MSU?

The design of this evaluation was basically a descriptive one of Master's Degree graduates who successfully completed their courses of study from May, 1979, to May, 1984. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and a mail survey.

The sample for the detailed study consisted of representatives from all degree programs except music education. The number included in the sample from each group was chosen proportional to the number of graduates in each program, except that all programs had at least one representative in this phase of the study. The representative sample included graduates from the following areas: educational leadership (4), elementary education (4), guidance (2), educational psychology (2), secondary education (6), physical education (2), special education (2), and, from vocational education (4).

Four strategies/measurement devices were employed for data collection. They consisted of a Follow-Up Study Questionnaire, the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire, the Interview Inventory and the Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument. The Follow-Up Study Questionnaire and the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire were mailed to the graduates during the fall of 1984. Data were collected by use of the Interview Inventory and the Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument during the spring of 1985 when the select sample was visited by the observers.

At the time of the survey (spring, 1985) the majority of the group held positions for which they were trained in their graduate programs. The major exception appeared to be for those trained in administration who had not yet secured positions in that area. Nearly 40% of the group studied stated that they had advanced professionally as a result of their additional study.

Eighty-five percent of the alumni surveyed were satisfied with their overall pattern of educational employment after graduation. Only three percent were very dissatisfied with their jobs.

All of the teachers interviewed felt positive about their educational experiences at MSU and, though expressing additional education needs that had not been met by their studies, reported having more confidence in their professional performance after completion of their studies than they had held previously. The majority reported a better understanding of educational issues, their roots and implications, as related to current job performance.

The group as a whole, ranked close to the 50th percentile or national average on morale as measured by the Purdue Teacher Inventory. They expressed greater job dissatisfaction regarding the curriculum of their schools. The efficacy of school programs for meeting the needs of students was questioned.

Nearly 90% of the Master's Degree graduates were satisfied with their programs of study at MSU. Nearly all persons interviewed mentioned specific ways in which their professional performance had benefited from their advanced studies. Only 2.4% of the group were very dissatisfied with their program at MSU. Four-fifths of the graduates would recommend that a friend with similar educational goals attend Mississippi State to earn the Master's Degree.

The major strength cited by graduates was the faculty. Over one-half of the subjects marked faculty competence, availability of faculty and faculty-student relationships as major program assets. The availability of a wide range of curriculum offerings was another

recognized strength. Graduates from different programs cited different program strengths. Counselors mentioned program strengths in areas of career guidance and group counseling. Educational psychologists cited their superior training for conducting psychoeducational evaluations. Program strengths in early childhood education were recognized by elementary teachers. Improvement in subject area competencies (math, science, foreign languages) was claimed by secondary majors as a program strength. Teachers in special education recognized the general excellence of their training for working with emotionally disturbed children, as well as in specific training in managing classroom behavior through reinforcement strategies. Vocational educators cited training in the areas of testing and program evaluation as program strengths. Classroom observers reported that 93% of the teachers performed adequately enough on the 16 competencies observed to be certified at the initial level but few rated at the level expected of Master teachers.

Relatively weak areas in programs for Master's Degrees as reported by graduates were: (1) Placing too much emphasis on theoretical, rather than practical, learning (cited as "weakness" by 58.7% of the group); (2) not placing enough emphasis on test construction and program evaluation; (3) lack of field experiences, practicums and "hands-on" activities in both quantity and quality dimensions; (4) lack of assistance in job placement; (5) inadequate training for handling discipline and time management problems; (6) too little assistance given in planning to improve student motivation; (7) no training given for supervising student teachers effectively, and (8) lack of concern for people after they graduate.

Supervisors in interviews reported that 52% of the 21 teachers studied in the intensive part of these evaluation activities, as compared to their counterparts with similar training and experience, ranked in the top five percent on teaching performance. All but two teachers were rated in the upper quarter (above 75th percentile). One of these teachers was "average" and one teacher was below average (lower 25%). These data suggest that MSU teaching alumni were generally highly regarded for their work performance. A small portion of the teachers, however, may be inadequately prepared to do the work expected. Three supervisors suggested that admission requirements might be strengthened, specifically relative to oral and written communication skills.

[1]Handley, Herbert M. July, 1985. Follow-up Studies of Graduates from Master's Degree Programs in the College of Education, 1979-84: Reflections of Accomplishments and Needed Changes in Teacher Education. Monograph.